



SGP The GEF
Small Grants
Programme



*Empowered lives
Resilient nations.*



SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, 1995-2012

Sharing Experiences and Lessons Learnt

Foreword

The objective of this booklet is to improve the project implementation capacity of future grantees through sharing experiences with some of the most experienced United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Small Grants Programme (SGP) grantees in Trinidad and Tobago.

UNDP GEF SGP has been operational for 17 years in Trinidad and Tobago. Since 1995, the GEF SGP has funded 85 projects with 1,813,456 USD in Trinidad and Tobago, with significant co-financing from various organisations, to influence positive national change in the GEF focal areas.

In 2013 to 2014 increased emphasis will be given to:

- 1. Education and increased advocacy on environmental issues;*
- 2. Capacity building and institutional strengthening of CBOs and NGOs;*
- 3. Increasing linkages between the project activities of community based organisations to that done by national level policy makers;*
- 4. Increasing monitoring and evaluation of all projects to capture and share lessons learnt from the implementation of community based projects.*

The booklet at hand was developed specifically to exchange experiences and lessons learnt (LL) between past and future grantees.

The presented results are based on a rapid review of the majority of the SGP projects implemented in Trinidad and Tobago, an in-depth review of 15, and the selection of five projects and grantees for detailed analysis and a participatory workshop with stakeholders. In essence the experiences and recommendations formulated in this brochure are based on in-depth consultation with the most experienced grantees of the SGP programme in Trinidad and Tobago.

Acknowledgements

Collaborative effort best describes the development of this booklet. The authors would like to thank the participating Civil Society Organisations (Nature Seekers, Toco Foundation, Speyside Eco Marine Park Rangers, the Belle Garden Wetland Association, the St. James Empowerment Foundation and Environment Tobago) and their representatives for their time and valuable input. The SGP - Office has further been of great help, beyond the line of duty.

Developed by: Asclepius Green and Veni Apwann (2012).

CSO Civil Society Organisation
GEF Global Environment Facility
NC National Coordinator

NSC National Steering Committee
SGP Small Grants Programme
UNDP United Nations Development Programme

Foreword



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Ms Grace Talma,
Chairwoman,
SGP National Steering Committee
Trinidad and Tobago

“Since 1995, GEF SGP has provided funding and technical support to more than 85 civil society projects in Trinidad and Tobago in an effort to promote positive national change in the six GEF SGP focal areas: biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, international waters, multifocal and chemicals.

This brochure provides important information on the lessons learnt from the many projects undertaken by the GEF SGP. This information is critical for the capacity development and strengthening of the GEF SGP as well as the development of the work of our stakeholders and other agencies involved in capacity development of civil society groups.

We thank all those who contributed to the development of this brochure.”



Dr. Nesha Beharry-Borg,
National Co-ordinator,
SGP Trinidad and Tobago

“This brochure presents an overview of the lessons learnt in implementing the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme in Trinidad and Tobago over the past 17 years. While there have been several successfully funded projects, two main challenges still exist.

The first is the need to strengthen civil society organisations to enable them to access the financial and technical assistance available through grant programmes.

The second is to ensure that the lessons learned, capacity gained and innovative work carried out on the ground is shared and articulated in a manner that will benefit future grantees.

The goal of this brochure is to fill this gap. Written for civil society organisations, community development practitioners and corporate stakeholders, it is meant to extract lessons learnt that can be applied to current and future projects. As such, by highlighting successes and failures, a more enabling environment is created for community-based environmental development.”

Planning and Application



Planning and Application

Experience / Lesson Learnt

Planning grants were under-used, yet more planning in the early stages can reduce problems during project implementation and build a closer relationship with the SGP office.

Recommendations

Use the planning grant to:

- identify in a participatory way your problem and most appropriate solution;
- identify your capacities and capacity building needs;
- identify and budget for the external technical assistance you need;
- establish a realistic project budget, timeline, and project roles and responsibilities;
- establish the criteria for selecting participants in project activities, such as training.

Proposals conceptualised and written by the grantee organisation resulted in greater buy-in within the group and from the beneficiaries; proposals written by external experts were often poorly understood by the grantee.

Use the planning grant to:

- take an active role in the project identification, proposal design and writing phases;
- avoid getting your proposals written solely by experts;
- get trained in project identification and proposal writing.



“Don't jump on grants just because they are available; ensure that your members really want it and that your organisational structure accommodates project implementation”.

Ms Susan Lakhan Baptiste,
Chairman,
Nature Seekers

Planning and Application

Planning and Application

Experience / Lesson Learnt

The value of people's time was under-acknowledged and under-provided for in the GEF SGP funding framework, leading to unrealistic expectations of volunteer input and inequity. Compensating people for income loss and/or contributing to their salaries facilitated transfer of skills from technical advisors.

The SGP expectation of 100% in-kind contribution was often unrealistic and led to high in-kind debt of the grantee's organisation as well as a skewed relationship between funder and grantee.

Participatory project identification was the most effective way of identifying the core problem(s) and potential solutions, as well as building stakeholder buy-in.

Recommendations

- Emphasise in project documents the in-kind (unpaid) time your members contribute routinely to the organisation and its programmes and projects.
- Budget for stipends and travel, but select project participants based on the criteria you have established.
- Consider some form of contract which requires participants in capacity building activities to make a firm commitment or give something back (e.g. attend entire workshop, conduct a free tour, co-facilitate a workshop).
- Ensure that the participating members of your group and/or the community fully understand their commitment to fulfil the in-kind contribution; only commit to in-kind contributions that are within your group's capacity.
- Make sure that everyone involved in the project understands that the "in-kind contribution" is a commitment from your organisation to the project and the SGP.
- Ensure that all relevant stakeholders participate in the identification of the core problem and its root causes.

Planning and Application

Experience / Lesson Learnt

Including a sufficient contingency element in the budget made it easier to respond effectively to unexpected crises or opportunities.

Organising community participation just for the purpose of securing a grant was neither equitable nor sustainable.

Recommendations

- Acknowledge that the unexpected may occur even in the best planned projects; it is better to include a larger contingency line in the budget rather than allocating all the funding to specific budget lines.
- Should you require variations between budget lines, seek assistance at an early stage from the National Coordinator.
- Your projects should be based on community needs that have been identified by or in conjunction with key community stakeholders.
- If a project requires only limited community participation, don't let funders urge you to create additional, artificial community participation.



“Stick to your original goal; don't let others change or expand the project just to use all available funds”

Ms Patricia Turpin,
President,
Environment Tobago

Capacity Building



Capacity Building

Experience / Lesson Learnt Recommendations

Weak grantee organisational structure and/or administrative capacity often resulted in project implementation problems.

- Avoid engaging in projects that are much more demanding than those you have successfully implemented in the past.
- Ensure that you have a clear organisational structure for implementation of the project and that each person has signed off on her/his responsibilities.
- Create a list of the project staff that identifies strengths and weaknesses of each person. Try to build on their strengths and address their weaknesses through capacity building.
- Consider seeking assistance from the SGP office to evaluate your capacity.
- Before submitting your proposal, discuss with the National Coordinator whether your current accounting procedures are acceptable; if not include capacity building in this area in your project.
- Assess whether you are able to communicate the project's key issues in an understandable way to your group members and beneficiaries; if not include capacity building in this area in your project.
- Consider questions from SGP staff or NSC about your capacity as an opportunity for self-evaluation and growth rather than criticism or a threat.
- Ensure the grant proposal includes capacity building in the areas where the organisation is weak.



“The group must lift its load together”

Mr Jace Bishop,
President,
Speyside Eco Marine Park Rangers

Capacity Building

Capacity Building

Experience / Lesson Learnt

Recommendations

First time grantees that started with focused, smaller and understandable projects gained improved short term outputs and long term results as well as increased group capacity.

- Be clear on what problem(s) you are trying to address, prioritise them, and identify potential solutions. Select just one or two of these to focus your project on.
 - Don't get tempted to go for a full grant just because the funding is available. In the long run, you may be able to access more funding if you can demonstrate that you successfully implemented smaller projects initially.
 - Increase the size of your projects step-by-step.
 - Align the project scope with your current capacity.
-

Projects that gave as much weight to organisational capacity building as to the other project deliverables made a significant contribution to longer-term grantee group cohesion and leadership development.

- Consider focusing your first grant as much (or more so) on organisational and leadership capacity building as on implementing the solutions to the problem(s) you have identified.
-

The most successful projects were those carried out by organisations with strong, collaborative leadership capacity.

- Use the project to build additional leadership capacity; projects that depend on a single person's leadership are very risky.
- Encourage collaboration between project team members and provide opportunities for leadership development, even if it is only a small component initially.
- Exchange experiences with other organisations about leadership development.

Technical Assistance



Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance

Experience / Lesson Learnt

Technical assistance that built on the existing skills and knowledge in the beneficiary community and was provided in a participatory way facilitated skills transfer to the grantee organisation.

Formal, written agreements with technical assistance providers resulted in better outcomes, whether on a paid or volunteer basis. Paid technical assistance tended to be more consistent and resulted in better and timelier outcomes; volunteer technical assistance was effective if the provider was part of the vision community.

Grantees that implemented participatory project monitoring and evaluation were able to react more effectively to crises or changes in the project environment.

Recommendations

- Ensure you understand what technical providers are going to deliver, including how they will build your skills. Remember that participatory processes usually take longer and budget the technical assistance provider's and your time accordingly.
- Screen and select your technical assistance providers carefully, e.g. ask others for recommendations and references.
- Establish clear contracts between you and the technical assistance provider; ask the National Coordinator for assistance if needed.
- Consider using part-time volunteered technical assistance as part of your in-kind contribution.
- Ensure that Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is included in your project design and budget accordingly.
- Use the results of M&E activities as an important opportunity to readjust project if necessary.

Technical Assistance

Experience / Lesson Learnt

Funder's and grantees' M&E processes were not identifying problems early enough to address them effectively.

Recommendations

- Use participatory M&E activities to identify challenges at an early stage and develop solutions.
- Discuss challenges with funder as soon as they arise, offering potential solutions where possible.

Conflicts within the grantee group were more common where unanticipated challenges arose during project implementation.

- Identify potential areas of conflict as early as possible and don't hesitate to discuss them with the National Coordinator (and your mentor, if applicable).
- If you anticipate conflict during project implementation, budget for conflict management training and/or consider using part of the contingency budget for conflict resolution.



“Constructive learning is not supported if the consistency of the technical assistance is not given”.

Mr Dennis Sammy
Managing Director,
Nature Seekers

Administration

POSITION	RESPONSIBILITY
CLOE ↳ PRESIDENT	• LIAISON WITH UNDP S/P • REPORTS
MARCIA ↳ PR-OFFICER	• COMMUNICATION • NETWORKING
↳ TREASURER	• BUDGET • FINANCIAL REPORT

Handwritten notes on a clipboard. The document is titled "UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme Project Contract Form". It includes sections for "Project Information", "Contract Information", and "Signatures". The "Signatures" section has a line for "Sally Blanton" and a date field.

Administration

Experience / Lesson Learnt

Recommendations

Groups that produced clear financial and technical reports and made these available to stakeholders created a higher level of trust within their organisation and with other stakeholders.

- Ensure that the project manager and the treasurer have the capacity to fulfil the financial and technical reporting requirements to the SGP, group members and community stakeholders (each report may be different). If necessary, include capacity building for this aspect in your proposal.

Grantees' expectations of timely responses from the SGP were often not met, during periods of hiatus between National Coordinators; this had a particularly negative impact when it related to delayed disbursement of funds.

- Ensure that you fully understand the funder's administrative processes.

The GEF SGP Memorandum of Agreement was generic and did not allow for flexibility.

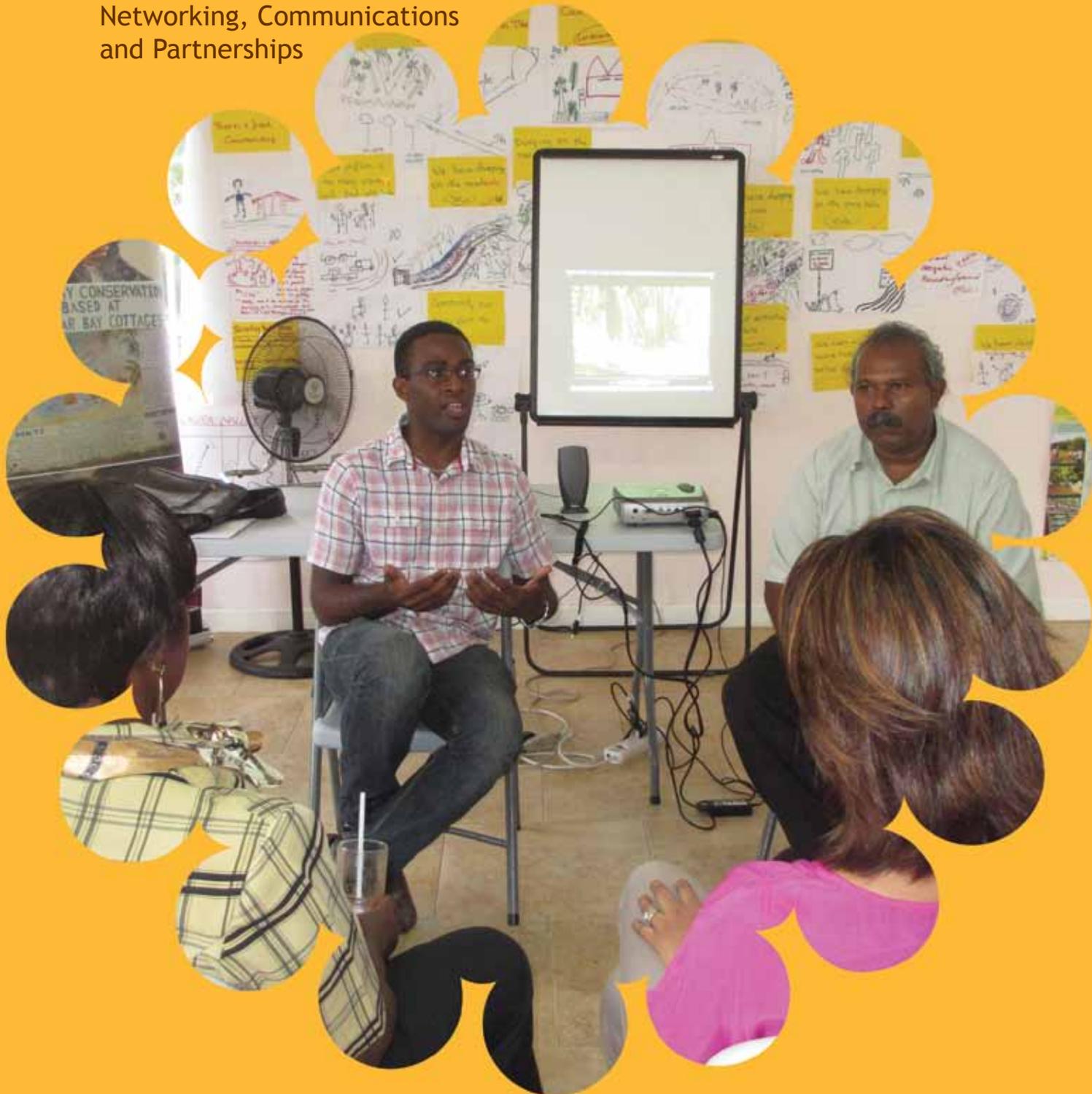
- Don't just accept contractual agreements with funder; ensure that you read them and fully understand their implications; address all concerns with the funder before signing.



“Communicating accountability and transparency to the community should be part of the project activities”

Mr Michael Als,
President,
The Toco Foundation

Networking, Communications and Partnerships



Networking, Communications and Partnerships

Experience / Lesson Learnt

Recommendations

Increased public awareness of a grantee group's efforts was a powerful motivator and was usually a result of early and consistent building of community awareness, buy-in and engagement.

- Identify the most effective approach to building community appreciation of, and support for, your project from conceptualisation to completion, and budget accordingly.
- Budget for activities in your project to honour the people that have made a significant contribution to successful project implementation.

Networking, peer exchange and support contributed to building capacity of all participating organisations. Understanding what has been achieved by and engaging with an organisation like your own is empowering.

- Talk to other grantees about their experience and apply their lessons learnt to the development of your project proposal.
- Consider including peer support, networking, site visits, internships and volunteers in your projects and budget accordingly.

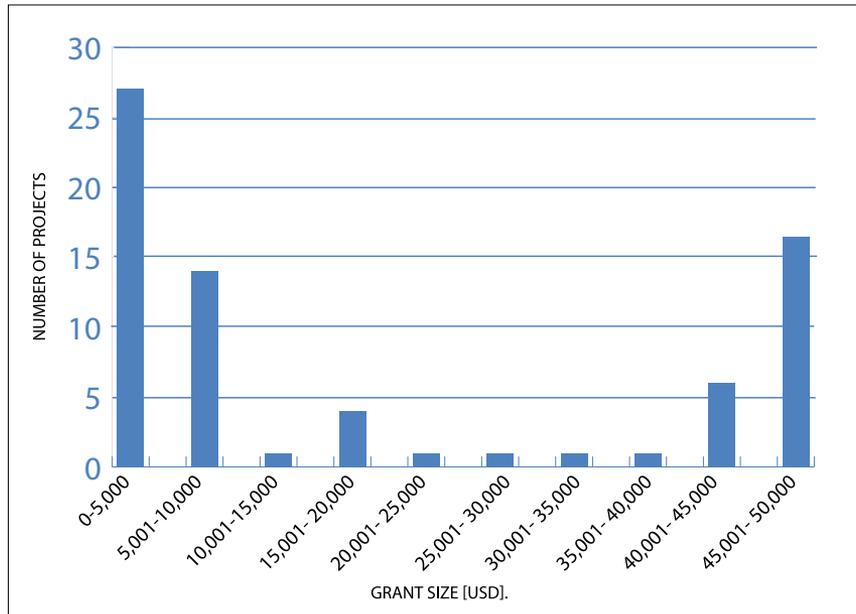
Successfully implemented UNDP GEF SGP-funded projects were able to enhance a CSO's reputation with government agencies, the private sector and other CSOs. Sometimes this resulted in co-financing and development of long term relationships.

- Ensure that the role of UNDP, GEF, and SGP is adequately highlighted in your communications.

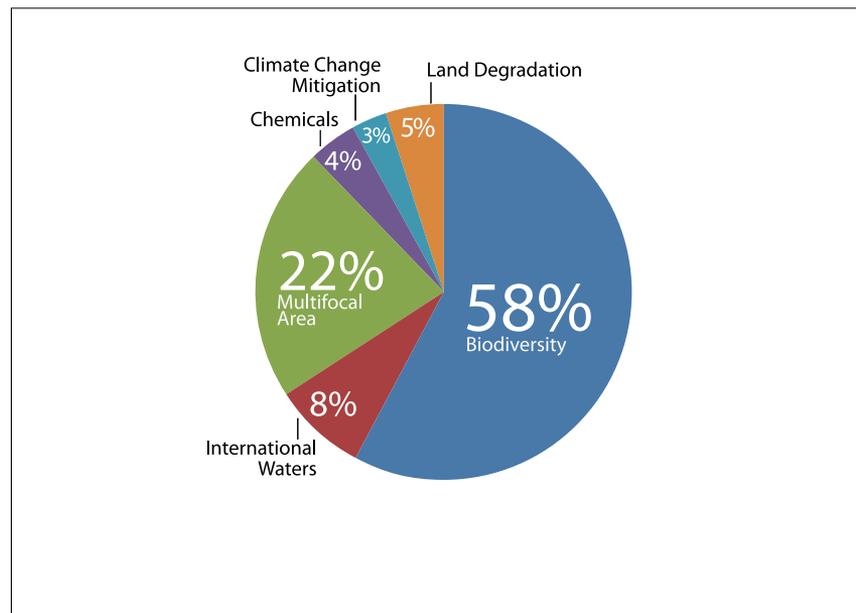


"You have to be in the community, don't be afraid to walk and talk".

Ms Glenda Gonzales,
President,
St. James Empowerment Foundation

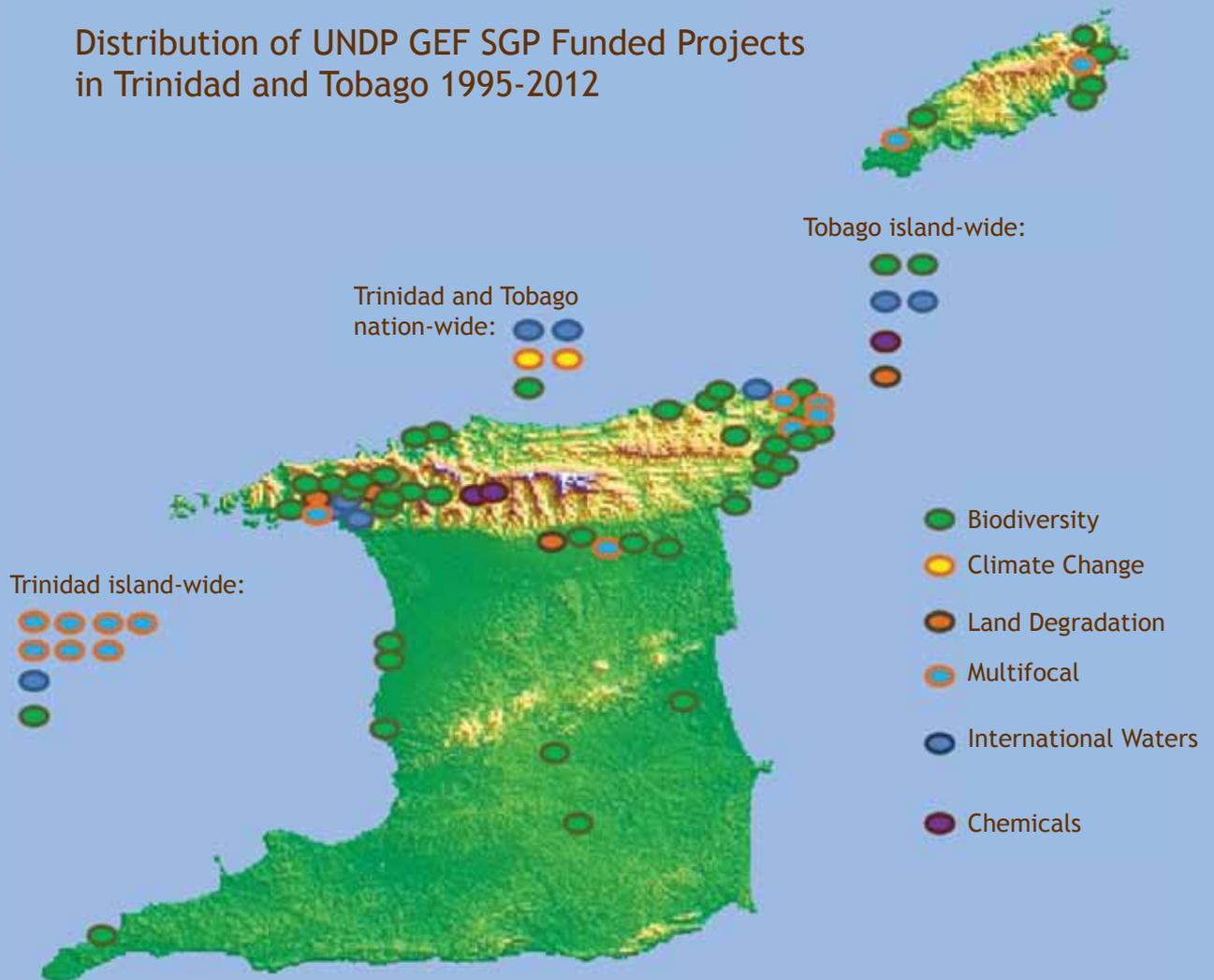


UNDP, GEF, SGP Projects in Trinidad and Tobago, 1995 – 2012 according to Grant Size [USD].



UNDP, GEF, SGP Projects in Trinidad and Tobago, 1995 – 2012 according to Focal Area.

Distribution of UNDP GEF SGP Funded Projects in Trinidad and Tobago 1995-2012





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For up to date information on the SGP in Trinidad and Tobago,
see <http://www.undp.org.tt/GEF-SGP/index.html>.

<http://sgp.undp.org>

<http://www.facebook.com/GEFSGPTT>

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